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Educational Wastelands by Arthur Bestor

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British Journal of Educational Studies, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Feb., 1987), pp. 81-83

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#) on behalf of the [Society for Educational Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3120827>

Accessed: 10/06/2014 19:08

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REVIEWS

developed *in vacuo*, and that, far from justifying education 'for its own sake', it was developed for the severely practical end of producing a godly community.

Dr. Morgan is well aware of the difficulties of using terms such as attitudes, beliefs, views, ideas, opinions etc., and of trying to identify and elucidate them in a particular historical setting. The traditional term, of course, is 'educational thought' as distinct from educational practice, what ought to happen as distinct from what actually happened. Certainly this distinction predominates in Dr. Morgan's study. The difficulty lies in the fact that they did 'occur' to people intent on matters educational. Moreover, in producing them the thinkers had a particular context in which they expected their thoughts and prescriptions to be implemented, and the thoughts themselves were in varying degrees shaped by past, present and future contexts. Dr. Morgan, therefore, engages in what he calls 'the social history of ideas, that is, the connexion between principle and plan-for-action'. After initial chapters dealing with methodological issues and problems of definition, he then considers the theological and ecclesiological bases of his theme. Particular consideration is given to the dilemmas facing puritans in deciding how far 'reason' and 'learning' could help or hinder their cause, and it is here that Dr. Morgan makes clear the variety of attitudes to be found. Three chapters on the role, status and practice of ministers of the Word then follow, the chapters on 'A Learned Ministry' and 'The Use of Learning in the Pulpit' in particular clarifying the importance of the Church as a house of learning. Alongside the Church as an agency of education have also to be placed, first, 'The Godly Household' – 'one of the centres of the puritan revolution' – and then, the formal institutions, the school and the university. Of all the chapters, that on 'The Godly Household' has a rather old-fashioned look to it. Dr. Morgan is content to use the undifferentiated 'parents' and then 'father-householder', with little or no reference to the role of the mother. The puritans (and others) accorded wives a 'weaker vessel' status in the household, but they nevertheless recognised that mothers had a positive role to play in the early education of their children, a role not confined to physical nurturing, but also including attention to 'piety' and 'manners', to religion and (in its wider sense) political education. Final chapters on 'The Institutionalization of Reform' and 'The Individualization of Reform' show respectively how puritan writers proposed to translate their ideas into practice, through the founding of new institutions, colleges and schools, or by transforming existing institutions.

Dr. Morgan writes firmly in the ecclesiastical history tradition and spends little time considering how far political and economic issues contributed to the formulating of puritan attitudes in his period. His knowledge of puritan theology and ecclesiology and his ability to summarise it and to clarify the varied weighting of faith, reason and pragmatics in the thought of particular puritans is impressive. Whilst he explicitly indicates his decision to omit comparison with the Continental and Humanist theologians, he could perhaps, with benefit have included, even *en passant*, some comparison with the 'anglican' writers of his period, though given his conclusion about the relatively conservative nature of puritan educational thought, it is unlikely that a great deal that was fundamentally different would be found.

KENNETH CHARLTON

Educational Wastelands. By Arthur Bestor. Pp. xii, 292. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985, £17.95. Second Edition.

This publication is a verbatim reproduction of the first edition which appeared in 1953. In his Supplementary Note to the edition under review (pp. 227–32) the author

admits that as a result it is 'necessarily dated'. The object, he continues, had not been to preserve a period piece 'designed to occupy a space on the shelf alongside facsimiles of old Sears Roebuck catalogues and other mementos of a quainter era.' The book was republished, he says, because it was felt to have some relevance for 1985. Whether it did, he invites the reader to decide.

The author begins his investigation with an assertion that professional people in American education had allowed themselves to become confused about the purpose of education and had supported school and college programmes which had made no great contribution to knowledge or to clear thinking. Taking this as his starting point he then offers his credo expressed in Twelve Personal Beliefs (pp. 9–11), which, he says, are his 'full and frank confession of faith'. But most confessions of faith for or against something have an axe to grind. To me Bestor's also has a bias: it is against (Dewey's) progressive education in America.

This book is highly controversial and to some it must seem iconoclastic. Evidence for this is found among the reviews of the first edition. Here is a sampling: 'With convincing documentation he supports the charge: "Professional educationists, in their policy-making role, have lowered the aims of the American public schools"' (Gordon K. Chalmers); 'A chief difficulty of Bestor's book is that he hasn't bothered to check his facts or to read with care . . . *Educational Wastelands* is shot through with distortions, half-truths, and pseudo-scholarship' (R. Will Burnett); 'To castigate with sneers and innuendoes those who have struggled alone with an overwhelming volume of educational problems smacks of a 'guilt complex' . . . Enormous help is needed, but Bestor does not know how to begin' (Fletcher G. Watson).

To justify the second edition the publishers say that it still has a worthy contribution to make to the debate today on inadequacies of the American educational system. To find out whether this is so they decided to ask two members of the College of Education at Illinois, Clarence J. Karier and Foster McMurray, to assess the book's significance. Each wrote an essay called Retrospective One (c. 99 pp.) and Retrospective Two (c. 18 pp.). This in my view was a wise thing to do by the publishers because Bestor is a historian, not an educationist.

Karier sums up the controversial nature of the book: 'How solid was Bestor's critique of American education? In some respects he was on target and in certain respects he seemed to have missed the mark.' McMurray has some scathing things to say about the author: 'He writes as if he *knows* that he is right and his opponents wrong . . . Even if he believes firmly in what he may think of as 'the truth' about education, a fair-minded person is capable of agreeing that differences of opinion from those of educationists are just that; a warfare of opinions, not of assertions that are open to proof or conversion into assured knowledge,' and 'Since much of Bestor's ire is directed against a kind of educationist who is no longer around, it may be that a part of his dialectic is outmoded.'

To me there is an element of the author's donning parts of Don Quixote's accoutrements when I read his charges at educational dangers in 1985 as if nothing had changed since 1953 in the American educational landscape. Indeed to Bestor things have been getting worse. For this assertion he quotes in his Supplementary Note the National Commission of Excellence in Education Report for April 1983 entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Bestor's references to this Report consist entirely of percentages and statistics with hardly any elucidation on how poorly the American education is in fact faring. Comments such as the following are not helpful: ' . . . we have a cafeteria-style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses' or 'curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive student choice, explains a great deal about where we find

ourselves today.' That untitled percentages, numbers, figures, graphs and charts can delude people is common knowledge.

The author's message is that schools must become mansions of rigorous intellectualism, i.e. especially science and mathematics. Scholarly teachers would alone be allowed to teach the pupils, less of the *what* but more of the *how* we learn. This would be the focus for increasing knowledge in America without forgetting its ambit which, he says, is liberal education. But he disapproves of the increasing numbers of American students enrolling for the 'general track' (p. 228) at the expense of 'intellectual disciplines' (p. 103). Perennial questions in education? Bestor is oblivious to the fact that again and again many reflecting people have expected the school to do things it simply cannot. As a result their disappointment has been great. His message has failed to convince me because he takes a very narrow view of education. To say that the particular contribution a school can make is 'determined by and related to the primary fact that it is an agency of intellectual training' is at least questionable. Readers of this book will be stimulated to think anew problems on the whole gamut of educational theory and practice, but above all they will feel impelled to look once again into the most difficult of the questions in education: Aims.

The book is that of a zealot addressing himself to anti-intellectuals who are also anti-democratic; its author is as one crying in the American educational wilderness, warning his fellow-countrymen to turn away from their falling educational standards induced by wandering in aimlessness in education, and to avert thereby dangers to their democracy by returning to their old ways of real knowledge and power, for the day of historical judgement is nigh. But if the picture of the American educational system and achievements which the author depicts in an almost entirely relentless gloom is correct, how can one then today reconcile that picture with America's might, wealth, influence and above all freedoms? What is then the book's real relevance for America in 1985?

The book has no index. The Select Bibliography lists forty-six publications penned by the author between 1934–1972, which betray his profound concern for America's drifting into aimlessness in education before his original edition appeared. His Preface to the Second Edition does not go far enough to alleviate the burden of polemics his writings have given rise to in American educational circles, a kind of polemics he does not wish to see end because he hopes that as a result, even as late as 1985, the vital question 'What things are of unchanging value?', to which his book claims to have the answer, will be kept alive in the public mind.

After reading Bestor's book, three phrases cropped up in my mind, which appear to summarise the grounds that might have prompted him to reissue his original book by exhuming it from the 1950s: a 'cri de coeur' of the missionary, Voltaire's 'écrasez l'infâme' or the crusader's fight against obscurantism and Fichte's 'the interpenetration of the individual by the State'. Mix these and you have the elements the book is made of!

Not in the strict Prussian meaning of 'State', but in the sense of a central federation of comparable educational authority which the author would have liked to see obtain in America such as the elitist 'Permanent Scientific and Scholarly Commission on Secondary Education' made up exclusively by scientists and scholars (p. 204), obviously with powers to prescribe, proscribe and control. Certainly this is reminiscent of Prussia of yore or the Federal Republic of Germany today in matters of control of standards in secondary and primary education. Bestor bemoans the fact that his efforts in creating such a Commission have been in vain. Yet he must be surprised to see that American society is sufficiently resilient to tolerate his views as well as the views of those he calls anti-intellectuals.

JACK SISLIAN